

San Pedro Riparian

National Conservation Area

Manager's Annual Report
FY 2014

2014

Manager's Annual Report



Arizona

NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS



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1 San Pedro Riparian NCA Profile

Designating Authority

Designating Authority: Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act, Public Law 100-696

Date of Designation: November 18, 1988

Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	BLM Acres	Other Fed. Acres	State Acres	Other Acres
57,000 acres	57,000 acres	0	0	0

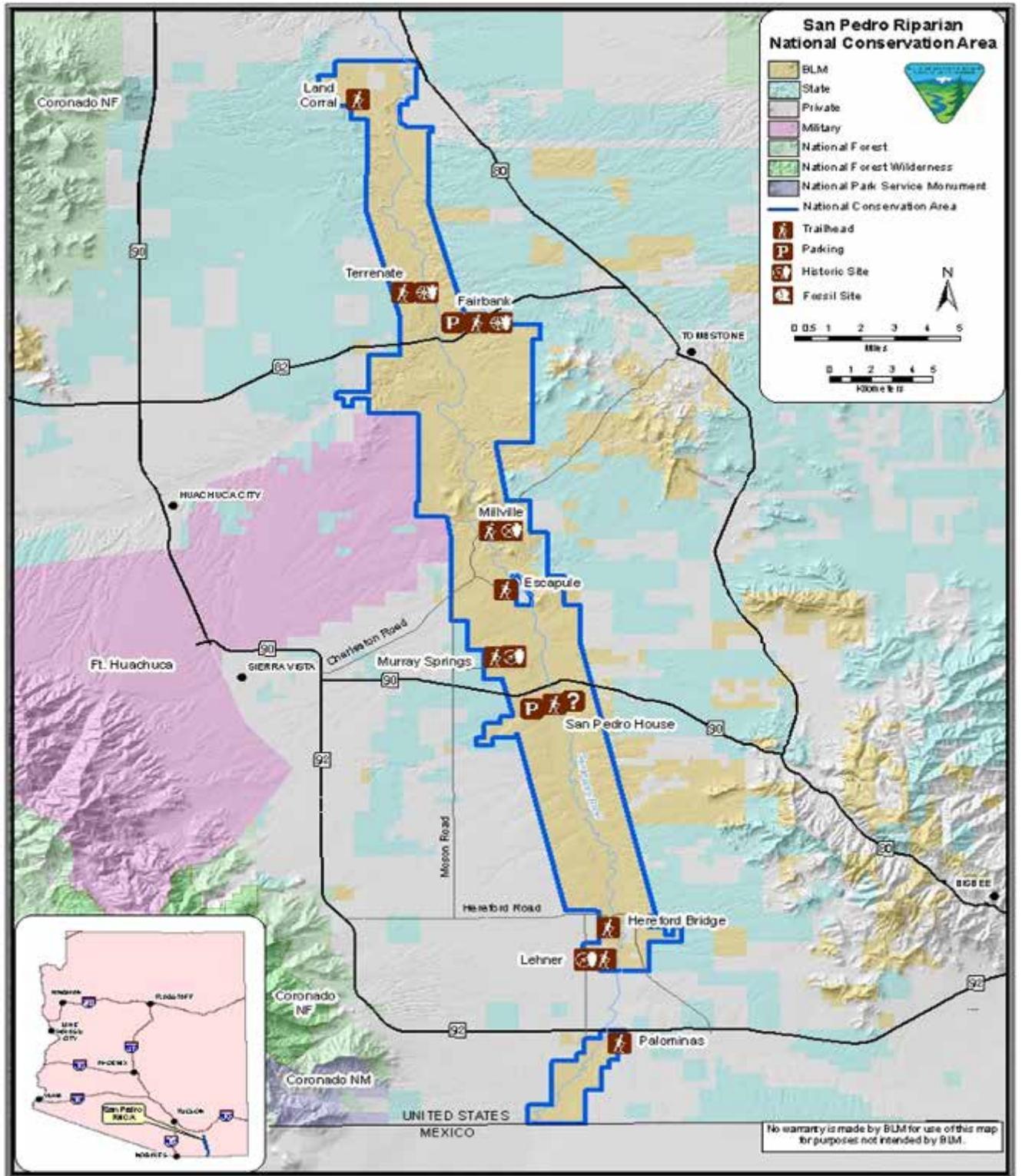
Contact Information

Unit Manager	Phone	E-mail	Mailing Address
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Field Office	District Office	State Office
Tucson Field Office	Gila District	Arizona

Budget

Total FY14 Budget	Subactivity 1711	Other Subactivities/ Contributions	Other Funding
\$1,222,944	\$666,951	\$555,993	0



Map of San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area

Managing Partners

N/A

Staffing

Current Staffing

Manager — Table of Organization currently does not include unit specific manager. Position was filled by detail during fiscal year 2014 (FY14).

Natural Resources Specialist — 80% (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Outdoor Recreation Planner — Full Time (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Park Ranger (Currently vacant) — Full Time (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Hydrologist — 50% (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Wildlife Biologist — 80% (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Fisheries Biologist — 40% (also works on lands and activities in the north and west parts of the Field Office)

Two student interns from the Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC) are funded through the Southern Arizona Project to conduct clean-up and reclamation activities of Mexico/US international border impacts to San Pedro Riparian NCA.

Other employees of the Tucson Field Office staff work occasionally in San Pedro Riparian NCA on an as-needed and funds-permitting basis.

2 Planning and NEPA

Status of RMP

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) operates under the San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision, August 1989. Additional lands acquired during completion of the Management Plan are managed under the Safford Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, July 1994.

An effort to develop a new SPRNCA Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement is underway. A draft of the new Resource Management Plan is expected in 2015.

Status of Activity Plans

There are no activity plans being implemented on the SPRNCA. However, a travel and transportation inventory is currently being completed, with the goal of drafting a Travel Management Plan in tandem with the new Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Status of RMP Implementation Strategy

The implementation phases of the current plan (1989 RMP) are complete. Actions such as the removal of cattle and the retirement of old agricultural wells were among the overall strategy. Management actions have always focused on preserving wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, protecting cultural and paleontological resources and permitting limited public use. During FY14, SPRNCA staff continued to focus on the preservation of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Key NEPA Actions and/or Project Authorizations

A project to install pipe, storage tank, and drinker at Palominas, on the southern portion of the San Pedro Riparian NCA, was constructed to allow for water storage and accessibility to large mammals not using the old cistern. The Palominas wildlife water was initially installed during 2005, with installation of well pump, solar panels, pipe, trough, and wildlife ramp into an existing cistern. Large mammals, such as deer and javelina, did not use the wildlife ramp into the cistern, which was deep and enclosed, the cistern was however heavily used by birds. The

existing troughs were in disrepair. An additional water storage tank and drinker was installed at this location for large mammals. The new storage tank is approximately 1500 g and was placed underground in a previously disturbed site at the existing cistern. A wildlife drinker was also placed nearby in a previously disturbed site, with underground pipe (about 1" PVC or similar) from the well to the storage tank, and from the storage tank to the drinker. This action was covered under BLM CX: *"Fish and Wildlife 2. Minor modification of water developments to improve or facilitate wildlife use (e.g., modify enclosure fence, install flood valve, or reduce ramp access angle)."*

3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

Accomplishments

Inventory of San Pedro Wild and Scenic River Outstandingly Remarkable Values

In December 1994, the San Pedro River Wild and Scenic River Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) declared that 44 miles of the San Pedro River corridor was suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS). This included approximately 38.3 river miles through BLM managed land (12,340 acres) (BLM, 1994). Twenty years later, BLM reassessed the eligibility, free-flowing conditions, and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the San Pedro River and its tributaries as part of the land use planning process.

A draft Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) inventory report is currently being edited, and once complete, will inform the current RMP planning process as to WSR values of SPRNCA. This WSR inventory report has potential to provide a detailed account of the spectrum of resource values within the 56,431 acres of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. It investigates possible changes in classification of certain reaches of the river by establishing additional segment breaks where river characteristics have dramatically changed over time. The river miles inventoried show an increase in miles due to the calculation method using modern Geographic Information System (GIS) technology in measuring the river miles.

Comparison of Segments and River Miles

RECOMMENDED CLASSIFICATION	1994 SUITABILITY	2014 INVENTORY
Recreational	2 Segments = 44 Miles	1 Segment = 4.3 Miles
Scenic		4 Segments = 18.2 Miles
Wild		3 Segments = 25.0 Miles
TOTAL SEGMENTS/MILES	2 Segments = 44 Miles	8 Segments = 47.5 miles

Recreational Trail Program

The SPRNCA was the recipient of Recreational Trail Program (RTP) funding from the Federal Highways Administration and Arizona State Parks. Almost 20 work days for the implementation of much needed trailhead and trail maintenance at the ten major trailheads in the SPRNCA were accomplished. Work included brushing and mowing, removal of flood and storm snags, some trail tread renovation, trash removal and the permanent installation of fee boxes purchased during the ARRA several years ago. All of the labor for these two ten-day hitches was supplied by the Southwest Conservation Corps/Conservation Legacy. The members of the six to nine-person crews are between 17 to 24 years of age.

Watershed Improvements and Natural Recharge Enhancements

The BLM Tucson Field Office (TFO) hydrology, recreation, wildlife and cultural staff has worked with Fort Huachuca (Fort) counterparts develop a strategy to sustain base flows which are critical to maintaining riparian vegetation and the Huachuca Water Umbel in the SPRNCA. The focus and purpose of this effort is to improve conditions of flow from tributary watersheds to promote favorable timing of storm runoff deliveries, enhance natural recharge, and natural regulation of erosion and sedimentation rates to help maintain base flows and water quality in the SPRNCA. Using Google Earth imagery, TFO hydrology staff performed a GIS analysis and delineations of watershed conditions and potential sites for groundwater enhancements within the SPRNCA. Criteria were subsequently developed jointly with Fort staff for proposing specific *treatment candidate areas* (projects) for this purpose.

Groundwater Monitoring

The TFO hydrology staff has proactively selected several "*candidate wells*" for additional monitoring. The additional monitoring will begin collecting baseline groundwater levels and subsequently detect any positive or negative changes from the effects of these groundwater recharge projects and the proposed subdivision. Accordingly, a 3-dimensional "*fan-shaped*" coverage pattern ("*parallel*" [X], "*perpendicular*" [Y], and "*range of depths*" [Z]) to monitor baseline conditions and subsequent (post-project) changes down gradient from each/all proposed recharge and potential developments has been developed which will also help to avoid unnecessary duplication monitoring. Quarterly monitoring of the "*selected wells*" will be adequate for baseline monitoring, but may want higher frequency at some (or all) wells if/when changes (positive or negative impacts) start to be detected.

Visitation

144,741 visitors went to the various sites of the San Pedro Riparian NCA during FY14.

Current Areas of Focus

Development of RMP

The development of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been the main focus for the SPRNCA in FY 14. The BLM Tucson Field Office (TFO) is excited about engaging the public, local communities, partners and agencies in the development of the SPRNCA RMP/EIS. Public involvement will continue throughout the process.

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

- In January the SPRNCA Proposed RMP/EIS Final Scoping Report was published. The document was made available to the public on the website at www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/planning/san_pedro.html. A news release was also sent to all members on the interested public contact list, announcing the release of the SPRNCA Proposed RMP/EIS Final Scoping Report.
- The San Pedro RNCA RMP/EIS team of specialists hosted a public meeting at the San Pedro Project Office in Sierra Vista February 22nd 2014. Approximately 25 members of the public attended the meeting to learn about the status of the San Pedro RNCA RMP/EIS and provide their input on management strategies that will be used for alternatives development. Members of the public included representatives from the cooperating agencies, non-governmental organizations, and property owners from within the San Pedro RNCA boundary. After an hour long presentation on the status of the RMP/EIS, the meeting attendees were able to begin reviewing issues raised during public scoping specific to different resource areas and provide suggestions for management strategies.
- Over 400 visitors come to the Fairbank Historic Town site on October 25th for Fairbank Day, an annual celebration of the site and the history of the San Pedro River area. Visitors enjoyed over a dozen activities and demonstrations ranging from antique farm machinery to modern fire-fighting equipment, mining and military history, local authors and artists, animals bones, and adobe brick-making. One of the highlights was "Camp Clovis" where displays of spear points and other Paleo-Indian artifacts shared visitors' interest with an archaeology presentation, a demonstration of obsidian flint knapping, and a chance to try hunting a woolly mammoth (cardboard target) with an atlatl, an Ice Age spear thrower. Also featured were a living history interpretation of lawman Jeff

Milton, and two re-enactments of the famous 1900 Fairbank Train Robbery, in which he was a central character. BLM Tucson Field Office staff and Gila District Law Enforcement Rangers worked with agency partners, the Friends of San Pedro River, to make the event safe, fun, and educational for all.

Partnerships

The San Pedro Riparian NCA has a very active, committed, and well-structured friends group, The Friends of The San Pedro River. This friends group is a non-profit, volunteer group which supports the BLM staff with volunteering time on projects, doing outreach in the community, leading educational walks on the SPRNCA, and supporting the protection and conservation of the beloved San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

The BLM participates in and sends representatives to the Upper San Pedro Partnership which is a consortium of federal, state, and local agencies as well as stakeholders and non-profit organizations.

Every year, BLM partners with The Nature Conservancy on the annual wet-dry walk for the San Pedro River. Every mile of the river in the NCA is monitored for perennial water at the driest time of the year (end of June). This monitoring has taken place since 2007.

The BLM partners with Fort Huachuca, Arizona Game and Fish Department, City of Sierra Vista, Cochise County, and Arizona Department of Transportation through the Cooperating Agency relationship on the SPRNCA RMP. Many of these entities also partner with BLM on projects throughout the San Pedro watershed.

Volunteers

- The San Pedro Riparian NCA volunteer program is organized by our friends group, The Friends of The San Pedro River (FSPR). The FSPR conducted 190 events enjoyed by over 1,000 participants and came into contact with 23,166 people during the year. These events included monthly lectures, interpretive walks, bird walks, hikes, cultural history visits to historical sites, the Spring Festival, a film festival and events to promote visitation of the Fairbank school house and other historic structures and points of interest. In addition there were a number of custom tours and other special events including walks and presentations requested by non-profit groups in advance. Volunteer hours contributed by the FSPR in FY 14 was 11, 762 hours.
- The Friends of San Pedro as well as the San Pedro Project Office organized and participated in National Public Lands Day. Volunteers helped with trail maintenance,

refinishing schoolhouse doors, conducting site improvements and helped to clean up the area at the Restored Fairbank Schoolhouse of the Fairbank Historic Townsite.

- The Natural Resource Specialist conducts a volunteer based MAPS bird banding station seven months out of the year. Hours of volunteer work for this project alone was 134 hours.

Land (or Interests in Land) Acquisitions

N/A

4 Science

Science

Currently, SPRNCA habitat management is guided by a 1993 Habitat Management Plan. Many of the objectives from the 1993 plan have been implemented through the past 20 years and have proven to be very successful. New objectives for current and future environmental conditions are being analyzed and will be included in new RMP currently under development.

A long running science project of nineteen years on the SPRNCA is bird banding. The San Pedro Avian Resources Center is a volunteer-based mist netting bird banding project, headed by the Heather Swanson, Natural Resource Specialist. Two banding stations are being operated in the SPRNCA, one at San Pedro House and the other by Green Kingfisher Pond. The banding station at the San Pedro House monitors migration and conducts public outreach several months out of the year. The banding station at Green Kingfisher Pond is a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival) station, monitoring the local breeding avian species. The data being collected at these banding stations is contributing to the local knowledge of avian: migration, molt migration, production, and survival. Also, the data is inputted into national databases both at the Institute of Bird Populations and the bird banding laboratory where population trends, migration paths, and much more can be seen and analyzed.

The annual SPRNCA fish survey was conducted during the week of April 20th by Fishery Biologist Jeff Simms, Wildlife Biologist Marcia Radke, and volunteers Jerry and Sally Stefferud. The survey was done at sites on the San Pedro River near Hwy 90, Hereford, Charleston,

Fairbank, and the Babocomari River. The percent of native fish has decreased over twenty years from 77% to 41% in the San Pedro River, and from 93% to 0% in the Babocomari River.

Wildlife Biologist Marcia Radke and the Arizona State University Botanist Elizabeth Makings spent a day monitoring the endangered Huachuca water umbel. Elizabeth Makings conducted the initial SPRNCA plant inventory in 2003 for her doctorate. The longest Huachuca Water Umbel meta-population on SPRNCA was found to be doing well.

5 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

Cultural Resources

The cultural resources in the management area represent a diverse array of site types, cultures and time periods. The human occupation of the area began about 11,200 years ago. Many sites have exceptionally high scientific and/or public values including sites that are at the international level of importance.

Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Fair- Excellent	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
56,000		56,000	0

Stressors Affecting Cultural Resources

The main stressors to the cultural resources include vandalism, and the absence of funds to rehabilitate, restore and protect these very important resources.

Wilderness characteristics

A current inventory and ground-checking of lands with wilderness characteristics was updated for the SPRNCA in 2013- 2014. The inventory process examined naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The inventory is complete but still in the editing process.



San Pedro River and the Mule Mountains. Area in SPRNCA contains Wilderness Characteristics.

Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Excellent	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
56,000 acres	56,000 acres	Determined once inventory is complete	30,048 acres

Stressors Affecting Wilderness Characteristics

Impacts to naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation include increased recreation demands on SPRNCA, and rural residential development of lands adjacent to the SPRCNA.



This natural environment provides the opportunity for solitude and reflection, a characteristic sought after in wilderness.

Aquatic Resources

Aquatic resources include the riparian zone, groundwater (the regional aquifer feeding the surface flow), the San Pedro River itself as well as its tributaries. Also included are eight permanent springs within the area. These aquatic resources support a wide variety of aquatic dependent species including the endangered Huachuaca water umbel, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Desert Pupfish, and the proposed Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Today, only a portion of the San Pedro River is classified as a perennial stream. This area, in general, is from the Hereford area to just below the Charleston Hills. The perineal portion is dependent on both the discharge of the regional aquifer as well as the rain-fall induced flows. The streambed disappears and reappears in the rest of the river in the hot, dry seasons. All of the tributaries of the river within the SPRNCA have ephemeral flow including the Babocomari River which was once perineal just a few years ago.

Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Fair	Declining

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
56,000 acres	56,000 acres	56,000 acres	56,000 acres

Stressors Affecting Aquatic Resources

The major threat to the aquatic resources is declining ground water table which reduces recharge capacity for the San Pedro River. Reduced recharge capacity results in reduced river flow, and reduction in river miles of perennial surface flow. Reduced surface flow and water availability impacts vegetation and wildlife. Other threats include bullfrog infestation and invasive fishes such as carp, green sunfish, largemouth bass, and channel catfish, as well as residual contaminants from water augmentation by the sewage treatment plant.



Enjoying a walk along a perineal stretch of the San Pedro River within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Wildlife and Vegetation Communities

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area has twenty-one different plant communities. When speaking of these communities we combine and refer to all of them in two main communities, for simplicity purposes. Of the riparian communities (cottonwood-willow, mesquite bosque, and cienega) there are over two hundred species utilizing these areas. The terrestrial wildlife species that utilize these riparian communities are 167 species of birds, 47 species of mammals, and 14 species of herptiles. In the upland plant communities (grasslands, desert scrub, mixed scrub-grassland), there are 136 species of birds, 37 species of mammals and 27 species of herptiles.



One of the last remaining cienegas in the southwest- The Saint David Cienega, located on the north end of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
56,000 acres	56,000 acres	56,000 acres	56,000 acres

Stressors Affecting Wildlife and Vegetation communities

Main stressor affecting the wildlife and vegetation communities is ground water reduction. Many wildlife species are highly dependent on aquatic resources; therefore, threats to aquatic resources are threats to wildlife and vegetation communities. Fragmentation of habitat outside the boundaries of the SPRNCA is also a stressor on wildlife resources as is climate change.

Recreation

Recreational values include 58 miles of trails, 10 trailheads with a variety of facilities and two bookstores open to the public. Facilities include benches along trails, kiosks at trailheads with information about the area such as maps and educational information, interpretive signs, corrals, hitching posts, ramadas and tables for picnicking, and bathrooms.



Enjoying the view after reading one of the interpretive signs along the Millville Trail.

Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
56,000 acres	56,000 acres	60 acres	60 acres

Stressors Affecting Recreation

Stressors affecting the recreational resources include increased maintenance needs of maintenance for recreational facilities (trails, trailheads, vault toilets, etc.), as these facilities age with continuous use over time, unauthorized uses, changes in recreation use patterns or timing, and demands for calls for new infrastructure.

6 Summary of Performance Measure

Overall the Conservation Values of the San Pedro Riparian NCA are stable. Some Conservation Values are declining because of the ongoing stress of groundwater withdrawal, climate change and limited staff.

Summary Table*		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural	Excellent– Fair	Stable
Wilderness Characteristics	Excellent	Stable
Aquatic Resources	Fair	Declining
Wildlife and Vegetation	Good	Stable
Recreation	Good	Stable

*This table is a synthesis of the individual object/value status tables in the “Objects, Values, and Stressors” section.

7

Manager's Letter

The late 1980's acquisition of the lands that would become the SPRNCA represented a seminal change in BLM's approach to land management, a broader focusing on ecosystem management versus the more traditional management philosophy narrowly focused on managing uses. Today, we find ourselves engaged in the important work of creating a new Resource Management Plan. This planning process provides further opportunity to manage the outstanding wildlife, riparian, and cultural resources of the SPRNCA from a holistic, ecosystem based approach. The planning process is also very collaborative with our partner groups, and as such, provides BLM the opportunity to ensure the public derives benefits from the SPRNCA into the future. These benefits include opportunities to experience solitude, to recreate, to observe one of the richest avian faunas in North America, and to experience one of the last free flowing river systems in the American Southwest. It is a pleasure to serve as stewards of this important resource.



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San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area

Bureau of Land Management

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